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Article By Arnab Gantait - The Literature Times Magazine Vol 1 Issue 3

About The Author-

Mr. Arnab Gantait is a freelance researcher currently employed by Neptune Holidays Private Limited in Kolkata, West Bengal, India, as an Operations Executive, Since 2015, he has been involved in tourist research. In 2014, he earned his PGDM in Tourism and Travel Management from the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management in Gwalior and also qualified for the UGC-NET. Mr. Arnab has so far published 14 research articles in both international and national referred journals and edited books and has earned 46 citations till date. His book chapter, "Rural Tourism: Need, Scope, and Challenges In the Indian Context" has been recently cited in the "Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) for Village Kalonda" – a report submitted to the Ministry of Panchayat Raj (Goll. Mr. Gantait is passionate about the academic areas of Responsible Tourism, Rural Tourism, Pro-poor Tourism, and Community Participation in Tourism. His credential may be verified on various research platforms like Google Scholar, SSRN, Linkedin, Academia, and Research Gate.

Responsible Tourism: The Mantra for Sustainable Tourism Development

Introduction

In the tourism and hospitality industry, Responsible Tourism has now become a catchphrase. It focuses on maximizing the positive aspects of tourism by raising knowledge about environmental protection and cultivating a deep feeling of responsibility among tourism stakeholders in order to accomplish the holistic and long-term development of tourism destinations (Goodwin, 2011). Responsible tourism is neither a type nor a form of tourism; rather, it is an alternative approach to the tourism progress (Goodwin, 2011), primarily driven by the "Principles of Sustainable Tourism", which is again based on "tourism ethics" and "human rights". This newly emerged tourism approach has various other aspects and it is frequently linked to a wide range of initiatives such as: alternative tourism, ecotourism, geotourism, volunteerism, rural tourism, ethical tourism, fair-trade tourism, and propor tourism (Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012; Baldo, 2016). From tourism standpoint, tourist destinations should be developed in such a way that the expectations like (1) creation of job opportunities for local people of all

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genders, (2) financial assistance for local entrepreneurs, (3) preservation of local cultural heritages, (4) development of effective visitor management systems to avoid overcrowding, (5) adoption of renewable and green energy systems to combat global warming, and (6) implementation of sustainable tourism practices can be met. However, many of these expectations are rarely satisfied in reality. In this context, a "New Tourism" approach i.e. Responsible Tourism (RT) has gained a lot of traction in the past few decades, implying an effective and efficient tourism management strategy with a clear understanding of creating tourist destinations a better place for the locals to live in; while providing an excellent tourist destination for the visitors to enjoy a quality vacation (Greening the WSSD initiative, 2003).

Objectives of Responsible Tourism

The two main objectives of Responsible Tourism (RT) are tourist satisfaction and welfare of local community people through active inclusion of tourism stakeholders in a sustainable manner. This newly evolved tourism approach strives to make effective use of tourism earnings for the preservation of the local environment and cultural heritages, which are the key assets of any destination, and heavily reliant on tourism development. The tangible results of responsible tourism also include higher income, dignified jobs, community empowerment, skill development, and capacity building of the local community members, and thus, allowing the host community members to experience a better quality of life (Sariskumar and Bhavan, 2018).

Salient Features of Responsible Tourism

The salient features of Responsible Tourism highlight a perfect balance between the positive and negative consequences of tourism in order for tourism to emerge as a significant medium for promoting and preserving natural and cultural heritage while also providing long-term benefits for everyone. Furthermore, responsible tourism helps in reducing the cost to the destinations. Otherwise, preserving nature's natural beguty and the environment would become a major challenge. Tourism places especially the eco-fragile destinations must be directed by wellestablished principles rooted in values, ethics, and morality, as well as local regulations, in order to apply the "Guidelines of Responsible Tourism." There are countless cases around the world, where tourism destinations have witnessed the good effects of tourism on both their people and their environment by following the 'Principal Guidelines of Responsible Tourism.' According to many research reports, such as CMI Green's 1st Annual Green Traveler Survey Report (2009), an increasing number of responsible travellers are now willing to pay more than they receive from any destination they visited in order to reduce their 'ecological footprint.' These visitors are adamant about using more local items and services. This new understanding on the part of visitors is a positive thing, as the money they spend on local handicrafts and antiquities will inevitably trickle down to the local economy. Therefore, it can be argued that, strict adherence to the concepts of Responsible Tourism can shift overall tourist perceptions and expectations to be less consumptive and demanding at eco-sensitive tourism locations, and thus, this tourism strategy or approach can reduce pressure on scarce resources at tourist destinations.

The desire to "be more responsible" has spawned a slew of new tourism concepts, including "Alternative tourism," "Soft tourism," "Ecotourism," "Minimum Impact Tourism," "Green tourism," and "Ethical tourism" (Swarbrooke, 1999). The "Triple Bottom Line" concept, which advocates for making tourism more commercially, socially, and environmentally sustainable was introduced in the mid-1990s and initially this idea was skewed toward environmental concerns, but the addition of a livelihood approach expanded the possibility for examining how tourism growth may help the underprivileged people in tourism locations (Ashley 2000; Goodwin, 1998, Gantait et al., 2021). Since United Nations (UN) adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in 2000, tourism has been started recognizing as one of the key players towards poverty alleviation, gender equality, community empowerment, as well as environmental sustainability (Moscardo, 2008; Novelli and Hellwig, 2011; Sofield, 2003). Responsible Tourism also addresses the same shift as it focuses equally on the economy, society and the environment.



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In recent years, the Responsible Tourism approach has gained more attention around the world. According to literature, the demand for responsible tourism practices arose from visitors' desires for a vacation that could satisfy "social needs: contact with other people and self-realization through creative activities, knowledge, and discovery" (Krippendrof, 1984). Here, the term "responsible" implies "responsible for" is implying that all stakeholders at a tourist destination are more or less liable for the repercussions of tourism as a business activity there. This notion emerged from a study of the economic, social, and environmental effects of tourism on places (Leslie, 2012). Responsible Tourism is all about of providing a better holiday experience for the tourists and at the same time, offering the local residents good business possibilities to enjoy a better quality of life through greater socio-economic benefits and improved natural resource management (Spenceley et al., 2002). Furthermore, The Cape Town Declaration in 2002 mentioned five core values of Responsible Tourism approach and argued that these five values namely, (1) commitments to mutual respect, (2) diversity, (3) transparency, (4) sustainability, and (5) quality; should be reflected in tourism development at tourist destinations to make them "a better place for people to live in and a better place for to visit".

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After witnessing the negative consequences of tourism's haphazard rise, a global awareness of the need to encourage responsible tourism practices at tourist places is rising day by day. This is a welcome change!

Conservation and preservation of natural resources, ecology and virginity of a place, culture of the host community people etc. have taken the centre stage in tourism promotion. In this connection, world is admiring the Responsible Tourism approach as a fresh air.

Responsible Tourism - A More Holistic Approach towards Tourism and Development

At present, the question is not whether tourism is beneficial or not, but how it might be conducted in a more environmentally, socially, and culturally responsible manner (Wilkinson, 1992). According to Hall (2007) and Schilcher (2007), only tourism growth is not enough, if equity cannot be achieved. Urray and Larsen (2011) have expressed their concern about the unequal power structures in tourism growth at various tourist destinations. In this connection, Liu (2003) has also stated that, alternative forms of tourism can be exploited by the governments, as well as by the tour operators as a "marketing ploy" to attract more visitors, and as a result, their focus could be on mass tourism; rather than making tourism more sustainable. The implications of tourism on host communities were investigated by Krippendrof (1987) long back, who advocated for a shift in tourism business that can include all the tourism stakeholders. He admitted that economic gain and tourist demand are the main motivations in tourism business, which can typically exploit the host community's environment, culture, and workforce and can leave them to pay the price. A good number of contemporary researchers have also shared similar kind of thoughts about the environmental and socio-cultural overconsumption of tourism development (Duffy, 2013; Urry and Larsen, 2011). Krippendorf's (1987) vision was therefore, for tourism to become a fairer playing field with benefits for all parties involved but not limited to disadvantaged and rural host communities. He demanded people (tourism stakeholders) to take more responsibilities and to become "rebellious tourists and rebellious natives". Since then, the Responsible Tourism (RT) movement gained momentum.



Responsible Tourism is gradually becoming more popular as a means of assisting locals at tourist destinations (SNV, 2009). Chan and Tay (2016) have addressed this "New Tourism" approach to the tourism management as a viable tourism strategy for assisting tourism stakeholders in achieving long-term sustainability goals at tourist destinations. To make positive changes at tourist destinations, a good number of modern-day experts also have suggested that, when constructing tourism attractions, both the "Principles of Responsible Tourism" and the "Responsible Tourism Guidelines" should be taken into consideration (Bendell and Font, 2004; Bohdanowicz, 2006).

Successful Responsible Tourism Models / initiatives around the World – A Reportage

The eminent scholar and practitioner Goodwin (2011) reported in his book "Taking Responsibility for Tourism" that, the Responsible Tourism approach advocates for three types of responsibilities: (1) responsibility to the environment through sustainable resource use, (2) responsibility to the economic development of local community members by increasing opportunities for them to participate in the tourism industry, and (3) responsibility to the visitors through ensuring their safety and security while travelling; which altogether leads to sustainable tourism development. Responsible Tourism recently has got a boost at several destinations around the world, thanks to the involvement of leading non-profit organizations. A large number of tourist places have already benefited greatly as a result of the inclusion of RT values. A few such examples are discussed in the following section.

Bhutan

Because of its unique tourism activities, Bhutan has firmly established itself as one of the world's most responsible and sustainable tourism destinations. Bhutan's attempt to maintain its culture through tourism is one of its distinguishing features. Every visitor to Bhutan is required to pay a daily fee. All hotels, home-stays, transportation, meals, and guides are included in this fee. 30% of this fee goes to environmental protection, community development, and community-based tourism programs where families welcome visitors during their stay in this country. This form of tariffed payment system assures that all tourism participants get a fair and living wage, while also maintaining a high standard for all visitors to the country. It also helps protect their natural environment, with little social impact and an emphasis on culture.

Kerala, India

Kerala is the state that is leading the way in terms of developing RT routes. Some of these destinations are Kumarakom, Wayanad, and Kovalam. Each of these locations features the 'Village Life Experience'. In these destinations, tourists may go bow-and-arrow fishing, or take a rural boat ride to witness toddy tappers at work. In the villages of Kumarakom, Wayanad, and Kovalam, the villagers use the coconut tree's leaves to thatch roofs and make brooms, they use the shell to make card and soap holders, as well as, the fruits are turned into oil. These locations also have a handful of RT approved hotels.

Costa Rica

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While the number of sustainable tourist destinations throughout the world is increasing. Costa Rica was certainly one of the first to embrace responsible tourism. The country is covered in a richly biodiverse rainforest, and the government has declared protected parks and animal reserves on more than a quarter of the land area. Furthermore, green energy provides nearly all of the country's electricity. Costa Rica's environmental commitment has paid off, with the country now ranking among the world's best ecotourism destinations. The protected jungles of Costa Rica are great for outdoor adventure experiences like ziplining, white water rafting, and hiking. Tourists, who want to see birds and endangered animals, can visit the area for wildlife protection. The Bribri ladies of Yorkin have formed their own community based tourism group. They've found a way to enhance their income through this group, allowing them to send their children to school and raise their family's standard of living.

Luxembourg

Luxembourg is leading the way for European countries in terms of encouraging eco-travel and responsible tourism. One of these eco-travel projects is an amazing and free public transportation system, which makes Luxembourg the world's first country to do so. In addition, this country has a well-developed system of bike lanes, allowing the tourists to lessen their carbon footprint while visiting this country.

Luang Prabang, Laos

In recent years, Laos has seen a substantial increase in the amount of effort put into responsible tourism. Not only for tourists, but also for the region's eco-development and local inhabitants, the emphasis is genuine. One of the regions that will receive increasing attention is Luang Prabang, which is quickly becoming a top responsible tourism destination in Southeast Asia. Luang Prabang, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has been able to create laws and procedures to accommodate the increased tourist numbers. Luang Prabang has made a concerted effort to eliminate plastic waste. Every public restroom provides cioth towels instead of tissue papers. In most hotels, little plastic shampoo bottles have been replaced with refillable ceramic bottles, and glass bottles have replaced plastic bottles for drinking water. Many hotels and small businesses encourage organic farming and often grow their own food. The government has even built water stations to encourage tourists to refill bottles rather than buy new ones, with all plastic packaging being recycled after each use.

Challenges of Successful Implementation of Responsible Tourism at Tourist Destinations



So far, a considerable number of studies have been undertaken to determine the challenges of sustainable responsible tourism practices at tourist destinations. Inadequate financial support and human resources, lack of information, lack of understanding of sustainable and responsible tourism principles and guidelines, lack of true business motivation to compete in a highly competitive market are a few instances of these roadblocks (Bramwell et al., 1996; Ateljevic and Doome, 2000; Silva and McDill, 2004). According to Rebollo and Baidal (2003), lack of government and local political support, lack of policy enforcement and environmental regulation monitoring also hinder the motivation to maintain sustainable tourism operations at tourist destinations. Apart from these, there are several more challenges to sustainable tourism practices at tourist destinations. Due (2009) classified these challenges into two categories and these are: Internal barriers and External barriers. According to him, the internal barriers are the essential priorities for tourism businesses, as implementing sustainability practices without them appear challenging. Whereas, the external barriers include lack of awareness and knowledge, lack of resources and time, high implementation costs, insufficient information, a greater focus on the return on money invested in the tourism business, limited backing from government side, and insufficient human resource power.

Conclusion

Responsible tourism is individual and collective decisions about how we understand and execute sustainable tourism practices at tourism destinations. It's all about implementing effective tourism management practices that maximize the benefit of tourism; while avoiding the negative impacts on local people, their fragile culture, as well as on the environment. The awareness and acceptance of various obligations carried out by tourism stakeholders towards any tourist destination and its inhabitants is therefore, important for the success of Responsible Tourism practices/initiatives at tourist destinations.

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